

THE X in the lower right corner marks the approximate spot on the shaft leading down the mine. About 12 years ago the ground gave way and dropped about 6 feet. It was immediately refilled and has remained stable since. Fulk Trucking is just a few yards to the right of the picture.

Well-preserved body found 39 years after Beaucoup Creek flooded underground mine

The Fulk Trucking Service is located on the extreme northeast edge of Pinckneyville, just off North Gordon Street. Gordon crosses the Missouri Pacific Railroad at that point. It's doubtful that many are aware of the fact that only a few yards east off Gordon Street and the railroad track, under the entry into Fulk's, lies a history of horror, death by drowning in a shaft mine (under that area). It happened January 5, 1880 when the flooded Beaucoup Creek crashed thru the walls of the mine and drowned a local man and a number of mules, all in a few minutes. The mine shaft is now filled and the story of the tragedy locked in the dark recesses of the underground chambers. Thirty-nine years later the body of the lone miner who didn't have a chance to escape was found by a team lead by the man's son, the late J. C. Niesing and a group of experienced underground miners.

Mrs. Helen Hubler of Pinckneyville recently contacted the Democrat and gave us a story sent her by her daughter Kay (Hubler) Buller of Bethalto, Illinois. Kay was given the story by a person doing mine reclamation research in Bethalto.

The story was written by the late Stanley Smith of Pinckneyville who at one time was one of the city's most prominent writers. The story reads as follows:

A Peculiar Tragedy of 1880

By Stanley Smith

To go beyond official records, it is customary to rely on old newspaper files, and on word-of-mouth, handed down from generation to generation. From these sources, an account of a coal mine tragedy that is probably unparalleled among the mine disasters of the state that have officially recorded is related.

Rev. W. S. D. Smith, who witnessed the disaster that caused the death of Joseph Niesing on January 5, 1880, at that time prepared an account of the tragedy for the local weekly publication. It follows:

"The coal mine of Bernhard Blume was, on last Monday, the scene of a casualty, the most remarkable perhaps ever witnessed at an inland town like Pinckneyville in which water was the destroying element.

"The mine is situated on a tract of land adjacent to big Beaucoup Creek, and on the line of the Wabash, Chester and Western (now Missouri Pacific) just north of town. The shaft is on the railroad track about one-fourth of a mile west of the creek, which at the time of the strange occurrence was at high water mark, the water nearly touching the railroad bridge and extending all over the bottom on both sides of the creek. Just north of the railroad in the field under which the mining operations had been going on was a valley extending probably one-eighth of a mile and covered by the back water from the creek. The mining had been pushed far beyond this and an air shaft had also been sunk. The mine has a roofing of hard limestone, but by the action of the water or some other cause a crevasse existed just underneath the upper end of the swale. The pressure of the back water made a sudden opening through the crevasse, and down, down, sixty feet or more, the water began to pour into the mine below, the death-dealing torrent increasing in volume and momentum and for a short time almost diverting the current of the swollen creek, carrying away whole sections of the rail fence which stood near the bank of the creek, many of the rails as well as other timber and drift wood being caught in the maelstrom and whirled down the capacious throat of the gaping crevasse.

"Of course it was but the work of a few moments for such a volume of water to fill the main entry, forcing its way in all directions. Toward the shaft it went with tremendous force. Young Blume, a son of the proprietor, who was near the mouth of the shaft feeding or attending to the mules, found himself engulfed and almost swept away by the tide, and hastily seizing the ropes, signalled the engineer to hoist the cage, which he reached just in time to be lifted from a watery grave, as the water with fearful force struck the bottom of the cribbing.

"About this time the phenomenon of a remarkable water-spout occurred. The vast volume of water forcing its way back in the mine in the direction opposite from the shaft, compressed the air in an extraordinary degree, and having no outlet from its ribbed subterranean cavern, the rebound was such that the descending flood was lifted as by an immense quantity of powder, and for several minutes was heaved skyward in vast quantities to the height of at least 100 feet. This tremendous upheaval of water, earth and drift, was succeeded by a few minutes of quiet, during which the floods again poured down the funnel. The air of course was again suppressed, and in due time asserted its supremacy over the ponderous pressure of the water, and again the upheaval began spouting and this time higher than before, filling the spectators with amazement at the sight and sound. This process was twice more repeated, when, the principal volume of air having escaped, the water flooded every portion of the mine, rising in the shaft to the level of the creek—the time occupied being probably a half hour.

"But where are the miners during this dreadful conflict of the elements? About two or three hours previous to the break they had all abandoned their work and came out of the mine except poor Joseph Niesing, who thinking there was no danger remained in his room which was far north of the air shaft.

"How he met his death will, of course, never be known. If still at his post, the probability is, that the first warning he received was the sudden compression of air which, indeed, must have been the immediate cause of his death.

"Mr. Niesing was an honest, poor, industrious, hard working man; he leaves his wife and seven children, several of whom are sick, in straightened circumstances. We have no doubt if the friends of this sadly bereaved family will take the matter in hand, circulate a petition, few, if any, of our citizens will be found, but that will contribute something to these sad, unfortunate ones. The sympathy of the community goes out to this bereaved family, and let us show our sympathy to be of the substantial kind if we are shown the petition.

"Mr. Blume is making arrangements to pump the water from the mine as soon as the creek shall have fallen sufficiently, when he proposes to resume mining operations. He has the sympathy of our people in his trouble."

This ends the article prepared in 1880. It coincides, in essentials, with other accounts current in Pinckneyville, years ago, as handed down from the observers.

One detail that is related in connection with this disaster that is not given in the newspaper account reproduced herewith, concerns the way the proprietor's son escaped. The story is that the engineer, hearing the signal to hoist, raised the cage to the ground level, found it empty, and lowered it to the bottom of the shaft. Confident the hoisting signal had been given, he is said to have raised the cage again, this time, to the tipple, when he found young Blum hanging to the bottom of the cage.

The forecast that mining operations would be resumed as soon as the high water subsided proved untrue. Big Beaucoupe rose and fell for many years before the water was pumped out of the pit.

Until 1918, the old workings of the Blume mine lay unmolested. In them, somewhere, lay the remains of Joseph Niesing.

Then, in later years, the Hale Coal Co. developed a small mine adjacent to the abandoned shaft.

J.C. Niesing, one of the family that was bereaved and impoverished by this tragedy in 1880, had become a prominent and substantial citizen of Pinckneyville by the time the Hale mine was developed. Four of his sisters had reached maturity. Their mother died in 1917. At that time, the man had been left a semi-orphan at the age of six, determined that the remains of his father should be recovered from the abandoned mine and given Christian burial beside the body of his companion.

In late October, 1918, Mr. Niesing enlisted the aid of Edw. Flynn of Du Quoin, now a state mine inspector, John and Wm. Montgomery, Thos. Hale and George McMath—all experienced mining men, and arranged to have the Hale Cole Company equipment at their command. Pumps and fans were kept in operation until it was considered to enter the old workings.

The experienced miners, accompanied by Niesing, began an exploration of the mine. They say they found that the roof had sagged in places so that, instead of ordinary clearance in a mine that has a six-foot vein, they had to crawl. A film of mud encrusted everything, indicating that the water, subsiding, had deposited a silt.

On October 26, 1918, after several days unsuccessful efforts, they found the body of the victim of the tragedy. It lay face down on the floor of his room, and conditions indicated that he had his working place in order.

The mineral-laden water that had evidently filled the mine for nearly 39 years, had served to some extent, as a preservative. One hand was petrified, and other portions of the body were right well preserved. The clothing and shoes were in good condition. A sack of tobacco and a small clay pipe, with a "heel" of tobacco tamped tight in the hole, were found in the pockets.

Metallic equipment was corroded. Pit cars at the bottom, awaiting the long-delayed resumption of operations, were loaded with coal that had not disintegrated. The pit car wheels had rusted down.

Throughout the mine, the exploring party discovered saw logs and fence rails, brush and other matter entirely foreign to mining operations, that had been swept into the pit when the Beaucoupe broke through in 1880.

The body of Joseph Niesing rests beside his widow in St. Bruno's Catholic Cemetery, near Pinckneyville. His son and four surviving daughters, Mrs. Anna Faber, Mrs. Theresia Schmeilding and Mrs. Ella Naughton of St. Louis and Mrs. Henry Mentel of near Pinckneyville realize much satisfaction in that after many years, they have fulfilled this obligation of filial respect.

THE DEMOCRAT

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\$1.50 a year. Jos.A.Brey, Publisher.

LOST LIFE IN FLOODED MINE
NEARLY 39 YEARS AGO

The funeral of Joseph Niesing who was drowned in the old Blome Mine, in the north part of this city, on January 5th, 1880, was held Tuesday afternoon in St. Bruno's Catholic Church. The funeral was private on account of the ban on public funerals because of the influenza.

The recovery of the body after nearly thirty-nine years was effected last Saturday afternoon, after much searching and dangerous work had been done by the State Mine experts and our county mine examiner, Edward Flynn. The body had been lying in water and was fairly well preserved.

Mr. Neising was in the mine at the time it was flooded and was probably far back in the entry when the large volume of back water from Beaucoup Creek broke through the top. The hole where the water broke through into the mine is in the old Bahr pasture, several hundred yards north-east of the old shaft. At the time of the accident very great effort and much money expended before the hope of rescuing the body of Joseph Niesing was abandoned.

From the time of the flooding of the mine until a few days ago, it has remained idle. Early this spring the Hale Coal Company, who had been operating a small local mine some distance south of the Blome shaft, decided to enlarge and begin shipping coal, so they went to work on the old shaft and re-opened it. John Neising, a son of the

deceased at once took the case up with the state mine officials and the recovery of his father's body was made possible.

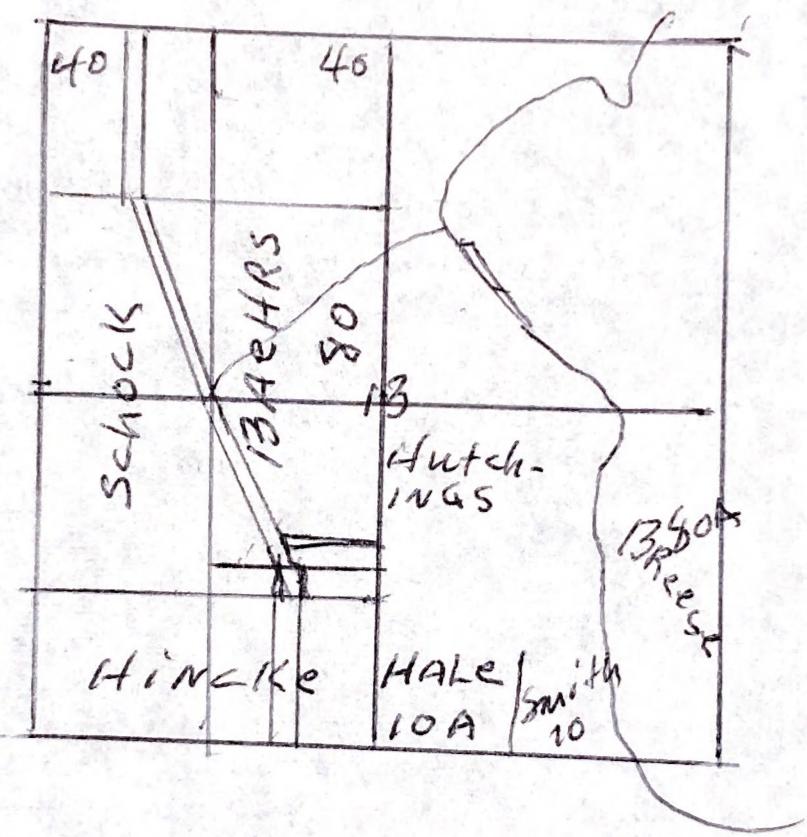
The old works of the mine running towards the creek will be walled off from the mine on account of the dangerous condition, and the once watery grave of Joseph Niesing will be closed to the world forever.

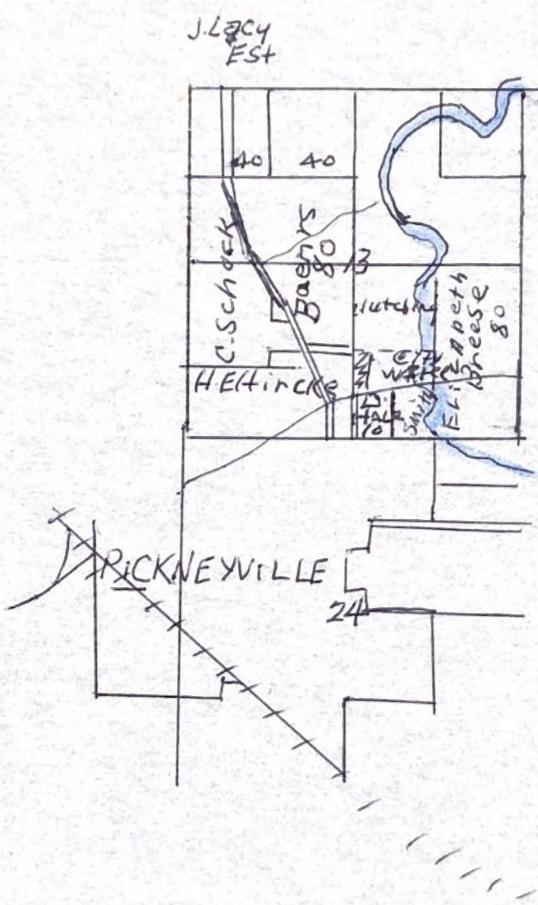
The body is now resting quietly besides his wife who left our midst a short while ago, and the children now can visit this beautiful spot at the Catholic Cemetery just west of town and say with contentment, there lies father and mother.

Today the feeling is relatively a brighter one. Joseph Niesing can not be brought to life again, nor can the resurrection of the portions of the mortal body that have to this date resisted decay bring fullness of joy to the family, but a lighter heart for the relatives from this day on, and the satisfaction in knowing that father and mother are sleeping side by side after all these years.

The following children attended the funeral: Mrs. Henry Schneiding; Mrs. J. E. Naughton; Mrs. Bert Faber; all of St. Louis, Mrs. Henry Mentel of route 3; J. C. Niesing of this city, and Mrs. Katherine Blome of Belleville.

Copied Mar 1981 by
Mrs. M. E. Spurgeon,
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Pinckneyville, Ill. 62274

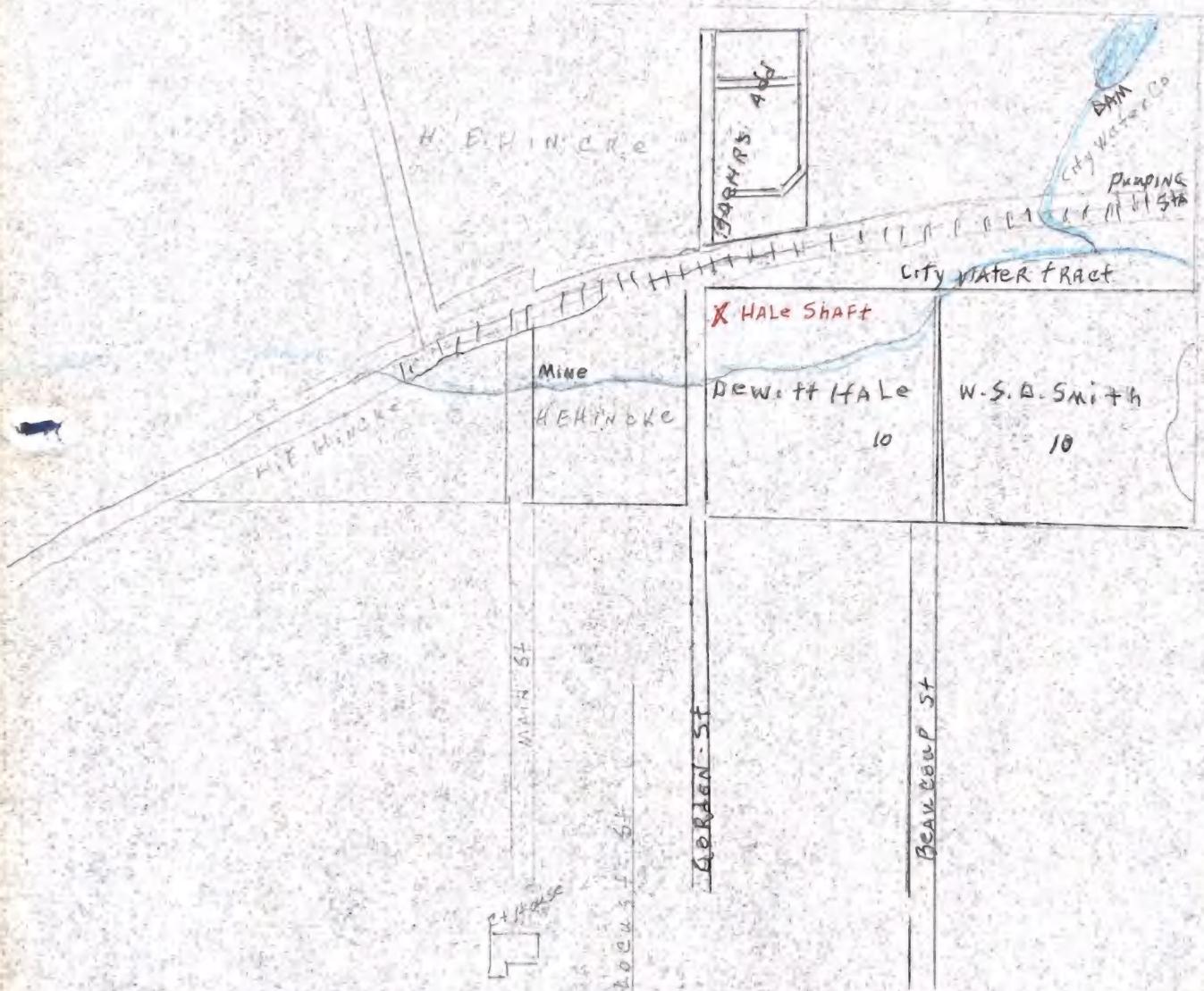




1920 MAP



22-2



Pinkneyville, IL 1902
Hate shaft. Added Feb. 1992



NEISING, JOSEPH

Perry County Court House Records, Pinckneyville, Ill 62274

- - - - - Year 1918 - - - - -

JOSEPH NEISING, born 25 Oct 1839 in the State of Massachusetts.

died 5 Jan 1880 in Hale Coal Mine, Pinckneyville,
Perry County, Ill

age 41y 2m 11d

occ Miner

Father....unknown

Mother....unknown

Informant....J. C. Neising

Body found on 28 Oct 1918. Removed to

Can't read but should be
Catholic Cem., Pinckneyville.

Buried 29 Oct 1918.

Cause of Death....Being drowned in Hale Coal Mine on January 5th,
1880, Pinckneyville, Ill. Body just recovered.

J. DOERR & SON

Copied from the record by
Mrs. M. E. Spurgeon,
710 Taffee St.,
Pinckneyville, Ill 62274

Perry County, Illinois

Office of County Clerk

NEISING, THERESTA

Female

Widow

Born 16 March 1842 Alsace, Germany

Died 27 June 1917 Pinckneyville, Ill Age 74y 7m 5d

Carcinoma of the stomach

Father - Anton Kint born Alsace, Germany

Mother - _____ Mathers(?) born Alsace, France

Informant - Mary Mantel

Bd. Catholic Cemetery 23 July 1917

Doerr Undertaker

Copied 5/19/81
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Pinckneyville, Il 62274

DU QUOIN EVENING CALL

"HARKING BACK"

100 Years ago February 26, 1888

One of the largest graves in which a single person is buried to be found in this country is at Pinckneyville, Illinois. A single slab marks the spot, but the grave is about ten acres in extent. Some years ago the deceased and his sons were operating a coal mine over there. One day the old man went alone to the pit to inspect it. While he was in a remote gallery the roof of the mine caved in and waters of subteranean stream flooded the mine. It was, of course, impossible to recover the body of the drowned miner, so his sons simply closed up the shop and erected the headstone, sacred to their father's memory.

Copied 2/27/88 by
Elizabeth Eiker Spurgeon,
710 Taffee St.,
Pinckneyville, Il 62274

the same time as the other. This is the
first important stage. It is the time of
the first 1000 days, and the child is born
with a full capacity and potentialities
and a great measure of self-government. The child is born
with a full capacity and potentialities
and a great measure of self-government.

It is the time of the first 1000 days
of life.

I have never heard of any such incident as the preceeding taking place in Pinckneyville, Il., except for that of Joseph Niesing who drowned in the old Blome Mine near Beaucoup Creek in the Baehr Pasture on January 5th, 1880.

As far as I know, J. C. Niesing, was an only son and Joseph, his father, was what I would call a very young man of forty years when his drowning occurred.

Neither had I ever heard that a headstone was erected for Mr. Niesing at the site, but did hear that the entry-way was closed permanently with Joseph's body and that of his mule sealed inside.

- - - - -

Elizabeth E. Spurgeon,
710 Taffee,
Pinckneyville, Il 62274
Feb. 27, 1988

Random Recollection

OF

STANLEY G. SMITH

If you knew the path that bordered Creamery Branch-- And, if you knew how to slip the brim of a new two-bit hichory hat beneath overall suspenders where they crossed, to bend over, resting both hands on the sandstone slab to drink your fill at Hale's spring--

And, if you ever played around on the leaky platform part of the old wooden dam that spanned Beaucoup-- caught crayfish there, and called it "ketchin' crawdads."

And, if you knew that cool relief, to hot, tired, caloused, dirty feet, came from letting slick, green, slimy moss ooze up between your toes there--Shake. Brother, you belong. You may have been another google-eyed "sidewalk superintendent," with no sidewalk to stand on.

That would be to watch Wm. R. ("Bud") Martin and Jasper Polly, of The Beahrtown Pollys, sink and operate a mine. Of all the shafts and slopes and open pits that ever operated here, and that means a lot of mines, this one really was distinctive.

These men then were coal operators. They owned the business, and they did all the work. One might observe that they differed somewhat from some other operators--say such as Jesse Diamond, Sr., and Eddie Hartenfeldt.

The Martin-Polly mine was sunk between the banks of Beaucoup creek, between the then W. C. & W. track and the now Victory addition, then Smith's pasture. It was a calculated risk, as army brass would call it. They knew the ways of Beaucoup creek, and that the next highwater season would put them out of business. Patient men, they could begin again--and did, farther south, beneath a sycamore that gave another mine a name.

No mine that comes to mind could have cost less--in cash--to develop and operate, and none demanded more foot-pounds of brawny expenditure per ton of coal produced. The muscles of these men and of their team moved the coal from where The Creator left it to the coal sheds of their patrons.

This sedentary softie's calluses formed in the wrong places to enable a description of mining operations in the accepted parlance of the trade, so this will have to do:

The Martin-Polly development began by shoveling away the dirt and shale at the spot selected for the shallow shaft. Ten feet would likely be about the total depth of it. One partner squatted and held a chisel and the other swung a sledge to drill a hole to shoot the rock off the coal. A little dynamite was needed.

They built a windlass of timber they cut in the nearby woods. Uprights were braced in place with a few spikes fastening the supporting timbers. The "cable-drum," if that is what they call it, of a deep shaft mine, is several feet in diameter. It whirls at a terrific speed when it is in operation. The drum for this device was a tree trunk. The ends were cut down in diameter to rest on rounded bearings carved in the supports. An occasional dab of axle grease was used to quiet squeak of friction. A crank was fashioned at one end. Rope to wind around this "drum," fastened to a tub made from some old discarded barrel, completed this "histing" equipment. To haul the coal up, the miners bowed their backs to turn the crank. So near the cropland, mine men say, to drill and blast down the coal would be disasterous. They had the task of undercutting and wedging the coal from the seam. That may be what was called "beatin' boney." How far back into the overflow land they may have mined before the operation ended perhaps no one would know.

Another cash expenditure avoided was the "royalty." They exchanged a winter's requirements of clean, shiny chunks of top coal for the right to dig out all that Beaucoup--or some mine examiner permitted them to remove.

It is good bet at any odds that no blueprints or cost accountant's calculations were ever made in connection with this enterprise. Man-hours per ton of production? It is unlikely that anyone ever knew, or cared.

Whatever these men got for all the coal they broke out and lunged and pushed and heaved into their wagons and delivered, they must have right well earned it.

POLY-VU
#PV119

K&M Company
TORRANCE, CA 90503



Obituaries
for reusing
Bernhardt Diemeyer
Ed. M. Gordon